

These 'wheaties' really make cents

By Roger Boye

HERE'S A question from the numismatic mailbox:

• Q.—I visited a coin store in the Loop and saw Lincoln pennies dated in the 1950s on sale for 3 and 4 cents each. The salesman called the pennies "wheaties." What's so special about these 20-year-old pennies to make them worth 4 cents? — L. K.

A.—Lincoln cents made from 1909 until 1958 carry the design of two ears of wheat on the reverse, and thus are often referred to as "wheaties" or "wheat ear" cents. Starting in 1959, the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's birth, the design of the Lincoln Memorial was placed on the reverse of the cent piece.

"Wheaties" are fast disappearing from circulation in the Chicago area. Most coin collectors report receiving

only one or two a month in change.

Even "common date" wheat ear cents are becoming a "collector's item." Some coin dealers will pay from 1½ to 2 cents each for common date wheat ear cents, and about 2½ cents each for common date wheat ear cents with "S" [San Francisco] mint marks. The 3-to-4-cents-each sale you saw is a typical dealer selling price for wheat ear cents.

Remember, too, that the age of a coin does not necessarily indicate its value. A 1955 "double die" cent [the date appears twice because of a minting error] sells for as much as \$385 in uncirculated condition. Or a 1950-D [for Denver] uncirculated nickel sells for about \$10.

The value of a coin is largely the result of supply